The Builder.

No. CCCVII.

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ONE of the first places we saw in Liverpool, during our recent visit there, was the establishment of the Messrs. Holme, builders, which displays more than usual care for the prevention of fire, and such arrangements for lessening labour and cheapening processes as can be resorted to with advantage only for large operations. The shops, which are very extensive, have incombustible floors and doors, and have along the ceiling perforated pipes, communicating with a cistern 45 feet long, 12 feet wide, and 6 feet deep, at the top of the building, by means of which each apartment may be flooded with water. The substitution of steam cocks to melt glue for the usual stoves, removes a constant source of danger. A steam-engine on the premises saws timber, planes boards, works mouldings, makes up the mortar (the water being laid on up to the heap, and the lime burnt on the premises), and performs various similar operations.

Amongst other works now being executed by Messrs. Holme are the viaducts of the Liverpool, Bolton, and Bury Railway, at the north end of Liverpool, in conjunction with Mr. M'Cormack;* a line belonging to the London and North-Western luggage department passes beneath the Bury line, by a tunnel near the French prison, and here they are now turning an enormous skew arch in bricks and cement. The span is no less than 99 feet. The arch, when finished, we were told, will be 6 feet thick at the crown. The Corporation docks, at this same end of the town, are fast advancing towards completion, under the able superintendence of Mr. Hartley. The enclosure walls, river wall, a lofty clock-tower, and other buildings, are all constructed of Galloway granite, and seem built for futurity. The face of the river-wall presents, amongst the comparatively small stones with which it is constructed, occasional large masses, to serve as bonders, which give it a somewhat patchy appearance; this, however, time will lessen. The backing is of Runcorn stone.

The extent of dock accommodation now possessed by Liverpool is enormous. The length of the river-wall, which fronts the line of the docks, is said to be 4 miles, and the total water area amounts to nearly 200 acres, with a quay space of more than 14 miles. What Liverpool will ultimately become it would be hard to guess; its progress during the last fifty years has been of a marvellous character, and it yet presents enormous capabilities for further extension. Mr. Picton, in his paper on ancient Liverpool, to which we recently alluded, corrects, as an error, the existing impression that the career of Liverpool has been one uninterrupted course of prosperity and progress; for long it slumbered over its undeveloped energies, and presented no points worthy of notice.* "The Castle-street and Dale-street, of the middle age of Liverpool, were not the broad and spacious avenues which they now present. Up to the end of the last century, and in many cases till within the last twenty-five years, the principal streets of Liverpool were narrow and unsightly lanes. Perhaps no town in the world, except London after the great fire, has undergone so entire a renovation as Liverpool within the last sixty years. The commerce, and consequently the requirements of the place, had so far outgrown the contracted ideas of its aboriginal inhabitants, that a complete demolition and reconstruction of its main thoroughfares became absolutely necessary. Old Castle-street, Old-hall-street, Dale-street, High-street, Tithebarn-street, with many others, fell beneath the ruthless hand of modern improvement. We, consequently, have not here, as in Bristol, long rows of venerable-looking half-timbered houses, projecting their gabled fronts and oriel windows in amicable advance to their opposite neighbours, looking like fossilized memorials of bygone times." In the course of his paper, the writer speaking of the Exchange, mentioned that additional accommodation being required for the merchants, a scheme was set on foot to clear away the buildings behind the Town Hall as far as Oldhall-street, and erect an exchange worthy of the increasing greatness of the port. For this purpose an Act of Parliament was obtained in the year 1801. The estimated expense was 80,000*l.*, and the subscription list *was closed in three hours*, although no individual was allowed to hold more than ten shares. The first stone was laid on the 30th of June, 1803; the masonry was completed in March, 1807; and the building was opened on the 1st of January, 1809: the total cost was 110,848*l.* He considered that, notwithstanding the advance in the art of architecture, and of all the sciences connected with construction, during the last forty years, the Exchange continues to this day unrivalled—the "*facile princeps*" of the buildings of Liverpool.

The design of the Exchange is usually attributed to the late Mr. John Foster, sen., then architect to the corporation, but this he doubted, and was disposed to think that the late James Wyatt had something to do with it.

Our business, however, at this moment, is with the present, and there is no lack of subjects.

Mr. Cockerell has just finished a building for the purposes of the Bank of England here, and it is one of his most successful works. The front is similar in arrangement to his banks in Bristol and Manchester, but is more ornate and in general effect far superior.†

Separated from this only by the road, is another, and more lofty structure, in course of completion,—the Liverpool Commercial Bank, which contrasts but ill with Mr. Cockerell's structure. This presents a range of Corinthian pilasters on a very flat basement, carrying an entablature which is crowned by an open balustrade, with enormous, ill-shaped vases on the dies. In the centre of the return front is a heavy ornamental erection, that has the effect of crushing all beneath it. The architect is Mr. John Cunningham, of whose Philharmonic Concert-hall we were able, in a previous article, to speak in more flattering terms.

Relative to our notice of that building, by the way, Mr. Cunningham has addressed an angry letter to us complaining that we had "invidiously stated that the roofs were of hazardous construction," "implying doubts of the author's practical knowledge and reputation," and that if we had known more of the roof, we should then, "with such men as Jesse Hartley, Cockel, and others, have pronounced the construction anything but defective." Further, it seems that he has written a letter on the subject to one of the local papers, which is to appear forthwith.

Our notice of the Concert-hall was a complimentary one: we said it was "a building with considerable claims to attention," that it had a good effect, "resulting chiefly from attention to proportions," and that it was distinguished by a monumental character. Of this the architect gives no recognition, — nor is he singular in this. We may praise a man for a "month of Sundays," and he remains dumb: the praise is simply the statement of a *fact* which needs no acknowledgement,—namely, his ability. But only say that "Jove once nodded,"—that his work of to-day is scarcely so good as a work of yesterday,—that you think him wrong for *once*,—and if he live no nearer than the Orkneys, Monday will bring us a page of abuse. Our praise is worth nothing,—not even a penny letter: but the slightest expression of our disapprobation would seem to have a very different value.

And now, what was it we did say in the matter of the Concert-hall? Not what Mr. Cunningham puts into our mouths, but simply this, that "The main trusses are of immense size and somewhat hazardous construction;" not one word more or less. We implied no danger, no doubt of the architect's skill; and if he is anxious that we should give proof of the correctness of this expression as applied to the trusses in question, we shall willingly do so.

As we have got back to the Concert-hall, we may mention what we omitted to do when there before, that adjoining it a Unitarian chapel in the pointed style, with tower, &c., is being built under the direction of Messrs. Barry and Brown. It shews the right feeling, and promises to be a nice building; but why such a material as *Bath* stone should be adopted for the dressings, which seems to be the case (the walling is of Rochdale stone), in a locality where, unless we are greatly mistaken, a much more lasting stone is as cheaply attainable, we cannot tell.

Amongst the most important of the buildings now in progress is the Royal Insurance Office, in Dale-street, at the corner of North John-street, and of which we give a perspective view.* It was built from the design and under the superintendence of Mr. William Grellier, who, it will be remembered, obtained

* The Bolton and Bury line was opened about a week ago. With the exception of the part named it was wholly constructed by Mr. M'Cormack, and cost 900,000*l.*, including the land. We understand that the line passes over twenty-six bridges, and forty-eight bridges cross the road. There are six viaducts on the line, two of wood, two lattices of iron, one of brick, and one of stone. A considerable portion of the line is horizontal, and the greatest incline is only 1 in 96. There are twenty cuttings, the deepest of which is 48 feet, and twenty-two embankments, the greatest height of any of them being 44 feet. There are eighteen stations upon it.

* "The first authentic record of the town under its modern name is found in the charter of Henry II., in the year 1173, to this effect,—'That the whole estuary of the Mersey shall be for ever a port of the sea, with all liberties to a port of the sea belonging; and that the men of Lyrpal, formerly called Litherpul, near to Torteth, may come and go from each side of the sea with their ships and merchandise, freely and without obstruction.' It would appear from this that the conquest of Ireland was the immediate cause of the establishment of Liverpool as a port. English settlements began to be established in that ill-fated country. The convenient situation of Liverpool for the purposes of trade, and for the embarkation of troops and military stores, began soon to be appreciated. Further to encourage settlers in the town, Henry II. turned speculative builder on his own account, and erected a number of burgage houses or tenements, for which only a small quit rent was charged, called burgage rent. It is probable that in this manner Castle-street and High-street, otherwise Joggler-street, were first erected. It would appear, nevertheless, that settlers did not flow in as rapidly as was desirable, and that at that early period the town of Liverpool, like a modern port on the other side of the river, was rather overbuilt, for we find that 34 years after this, in the year 1207, King John, wishing to let his burgesses in Liverpool, issued a charter, which is still in existence, and forms the earliest in the series of our corporation muniments."

† We shall probably give illustrations of this, and some of the other buildings already mentioned by us, in early numbers.

* See page 619.

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